

# **Early Childhood Development & Health Board Quality Fact Sheet 1**

## **Why Should You Care About Early Care and Education?**

In many important ways, the preschool years determine our future competitive role in the global economy, the public safety of our communities, the cost-effective investment of public and private dollars, and the success of welfare reform. Child care and education provides a necessary support for families, and the quality of that care is critical to the healthy development of children. If done well, child care benefits us all.

What do we mean when we say child care and education? Child care and education is the privately or publicly financed services a child receives in a center or home-based setting when not in the direct care of a parent. The safe, nurturing environment of quality child care may support a child's need for early education, a parent's need to work or attend school, or a child's need for a healthy meal and protection resulting from a family crisis.

### ***Research Says:***

The number one predictor of quality is the education level and specialized training of the early childhood professional.

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit most from high-quality child care and early education programs. (Manhattan Institute, *"Pre-K: Shaping the System That Shapes Children"*, 2006)

Children in higher quality care had more advanced language development. Children in lower quality care became progressively further behind the children in higher quality care on all language measures, especially with vocabulary.

(Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at UNC-Chapel Hill, *"Quality of Childcare Affects Language Development"*, 2007)

## **Early Childhood Development & Health Board Quality Fact Sheet 2**

### **Why is High Quality Early Childhood Education Important?**

Research on brain development scientifically demonstrates how important the first years of life are to a child's later development and readiness for school. High-quality early childhood education is one of the most effective ways to ensure children begin school with the skills they need to succeed. It is associated with higher reading skills, better test scores, and fewer behavioral problems. Low quality early childhood education can have the opposite effect.

Children may spend 30-40 hours per week for as long as 5 years in out-of-home care, before they start kindergarten. Arizona regulates the health and safety of some out-of-home care, but does not measure the quality of that care. Many states are now developing quality improvement and rating systems, which have been proven to improve standards for early childhood providers, as well as to give parents the information they need to select high-quality care. These systems depend upon well trained staff to survey and monitor programs.

- 90% of a child's brain develops by age 5, and stimulating learning experiences during this period of rapid growth lay the groundwork for a lifetime of learning.  
(Zero-to-Three Brain Wonders)
- More than 40% of America's children are not fully prepared for school when they arrive in kindergarten.  
*"Set for Success: Building a Strong Foundation for School Readiness Based on the Social and Emotional Development of Young Children,"* Kauffman Early Education Exchange
- Good quality child care is strongly linked to school achievement and the development of social skills that enable a child to grow into happy, productive adults. Such child care has been used successfully to prepare at-risk children for school while poor quality child care can harm children. Their intellectual and social development can be stunted. In extreme cases, children have been harmed physically.  
*"Good Quality Child Care: A Dramatic Opportunity to Promote Learning and Prevent Damage in Our Youngest Children,"* Child Care Action Campaign, 1996

Currently, early childhood education functions in Arizona are spread among multiple state, tribal and local agencies, and no state-level body has authority to promote coordination.

## Early Childhood Development & Health Board Quality Fact Sheet 3

### What are the Key Indicators of Quality in Early Care and Education?

- ❖ **Adult to Child Ratio\***: How many children are there for each adult?
  - Fewer children for each adult is better
  - The younger the child, the smaller the ratio
  - 1:4 (one adult for four infants) and 1:10 (one adult for ten preschoolers) are optimal ratios
- ❖ **Group Size\*\***: How large is each group of children?
  - Smaller groups are better
  - The younger the child, the smaller the group size
  - No more than 8 infants and 20 preschoolers should be in a group
- ❖ **Director Qualifications and Leadership\*\*\***: What knowledge and leadership does the director bring to the program?
  - Philosophy and standards set by the director
  - Administrative skills guide center operations
- ❖ **Teacher/Caregiver Qualifications\*\*\*\***: What is the caregiver's education and training?
  - Degrees and specialized training result in better child outcomes
  - They should receive continuing education
- ❖ **Turnover**: How long have the teacher/caregivers been in their job?
  - Young children need continuous care by trusted adults
  - Children should be with one adult for at least one year
  - Continuity of care is most important for infants and toddlers
- ❖ **Curriculum**: Is it developmentally and culturally appropriate, stimulating and intentional?
  - Individual goals and activities planned for each child
  - Reflects all areas of child development: physical, social, emotional and cognitive
- ❖ **Accreditation**: Is the program accredited by a national organization?
  - Voluntary standards which are higher than licensing requirements
  - Examples are:
    - ❖ National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
    - ❖ National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)
    - ❖ National Accreditation Commission (NAC)

## Early Childhood Development & Health Board Quality Fact Sheet 4

### How Do We Ensure High-Quality Early Childhood Programs?

- Advocate for **Quality Child Care Licensing Regulations**, which set the foundation for basic health, safety and well-being of children in out-of-home early childhood programs.
- Set **High Quality Standards** for programs (e.g. accreditation or other quality rating system) and for practitioners (e.g. a credential, degree, license, career lattice).
- Provide **Supports**, such as technical assistance and grants, to help programs and practitioners meet standards.
- Create **Infrastructure** to ensure that programs and practitioners maintain compliance with quality standards.
- Provide **Financial Assistance** linked to meeting standards.
- Build **Understanding and Support** among child care providers about quality.
- Ensure **Consumer Engagement** in selecting high-quality child care by providing information.
- Improve **compensation, benefits, and working conditions** for early childhood practitioners.
- Create **public-private partnerships** to build capacity of local communities to provide quality early childhood education.
- **Coordinate** early childhood functions between state agencies, Head Start and Tribes.

*"Improving Child Care Quality: Key Elements", Alliance for Early Childhood Finance*

## Early Childhood Development & Health Board Quality Fact Sheet 5

### What Would You See in a High-Quality Early Childhood Program?

- **Teachers / caregivers** who are responsive and engaged with children in conversation, play and interactions.
- **Indoor and outdoor environments** that are safe, child-centered, stimulating without being overwhelming, and contain a variety of age-appropriate toys and materials available to children.
- **Daily schedule and routines** which are predictable and have a balance of:
  - child-directed and teacher-directed activities
  - indoor and outdoor time
  - active and quiet activities
- Well-designed **curriculum** which is research-based, culturally and linguistically sensitive, and aligned with early learning standards (Arizona Early Childhood Education Standards, Head Start Performance Standards).
- **Ongoing assessment** of children's progress and program effectiveness that support individual children's learning and development, as well as programs' continuous improvement.
- **Family involvement and education** opportunities for parents, guardians and other family members.